REMEMBERING DARRELL MORRISEY

BY

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CORACLE
PRESS

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Coracle Press

Montreal, QC

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the people who contacted me about finding paintings by Darrell Morrisey; they are: Michael Millman, of the West End Gallery, Westmount, Quebec; Gretchen Shoring, of ARTI, in London, United Kingdom; and Charles Lecours of Sherbrooke, Quebec. The cover photo of Darrell Morrisey is cropped from a family photograph outside of their Westmount home, from around 1920; see the original photograph on the back cover. At the time of writing the information presented here was as correct as I could determine. SM

Darrell Morrisey

Darrell Morrisey (1897-1930) is one of several forgotten artists who were also members of the Beaver Hall Group; for whatever reasons—early death, financial constraints, marriage—these artists disappeared into obscurity; however, being forgotten is no longer Darrell Morrisey's fate.

This research into Darrell Morrisey's life and art has been a joint effort between Cynthia Coristine and myself with invaluable help from Evelyn Walters. Cynthia Coristine and Ian Browness, who live in Ottawa, are the co-authors of *The Life of James Coristine* (2009); James Coristine (1837-1908), an ancestor of Cynthia Coristine, was a Montreal businessman who built a prosperous and highly successful "wholesale fur import, manufacturing and dry goods business" and also constructed the prestigious Coristine Building in historical Old Montreal.

It was around May 2010 that Evelyn Walters, the author of *The Women Of Beaver Hall: Canadian Modernist Painters* (2005) and *Prudence Heward, Canadian Modernist Painter* (2022), contacted me; she had seen my Morrissey Family History website and inquired if I knew of Darrell Morrisey. My reply was that I had never heard of Darrell but then, only a few minutes later, I wondered if there was a connection between Darrell and Thomas Sydney Morrisey; Colonel Sydney Morrisey had contacted my mother around 1940, he was looking into his family

history and wanted to know if there was any connection between our Morrissey family and his; there is no connection that I know of.

Several years previous to receiving Evelyn Walter's email, I had been contacted by Cynthia Coristine, one of her Coristine ancestors had married a Morrisey and she inquired if there was a connection with our family; Beatrice Coristine married Thomas Sydney Morrisey (1890-1975) in 1916, and Darrell Morrisey was Bea Coristine's sister-in-law. Beatrice Coristine (1891-1969) is a daughter of James Coristine, the Montreal businessman whose history and family Cynthia Coristine wrote about. And so, with information from both Evelyn Walters and Cynthia Coristine, the journey into discovering Darrell Morrisey's life and art began.

Someone asked me why I am interested in Darrell Morrisey. Why research Darrell's life and art when she is, generally speaking, insignificant as an artist? Perhaps it's all been a folly, of interest to two or three people but to no one else. I have always loved visual art, visiting art galleries or museums, and reading about different periods of art history and biographies of artists and poets; this, and an interest in history—Canadian and Montreal history, and family history—, accounts for my interest in Darrell Morrisey. There is also a certain charisma to Darrell that can still be felt long after her death. She was a young woman who was dedicated to being an artist, Darrell's family encouraged her art but they also viewed it as a hobby and they wanted her to marry and have children, as her brother Sydney had done. It seems that eventually the family realized that Darrell would not fulfill roles in society expected of her, no husband, no children, and not even living near them in Montreal.

Today, fifteen years after beginning this research into Darrell Morrisey's life and over eighty years after Darrell's brother spoke with my mother, and over ninety years since Darrell

died, from knowing almost nothing about Darrell, we now have a fairly good knowledge of her life and, so far, five paintings by Darrell Morrisey have been discovered.

One of the mysteries of Darrell Morrisey is where are her paintings, what happened to them? In her short life she produced a body of work that has mostly disappeared even though she contributed to the Art Association of Montreal's annual exhibitions and reviews of her work were positive. An elderly lady I met, who knew Sydney Morrisey and attended the same church as his family, suggested that Darrell's paintings mustn't have been very good for them to have been thrown away, maybe this was the attitude of Darrell's family.

Darrell Morrisey was a member of the upper middle class who lived in the City of Westmount, adjacent to Montreal; her family home was Hazelbrae, constructed in 1878 and located at 85 Church Hill Avenue, it was the former home of the first mayor of the City of Westmount. Darrell attended Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's, a private school for girls in Westmount that was also attended by several other members of the Beaver Hall Group of artists, and then, in September 1913, she attended Tudor Hall School, a boarding school in the United Kingdom with only 40 students.

Darrell's Christian name was always a mystery until we discovered that she was named after Charles Darrell (1841-1921), a friend of Darrell's father, Thomas Louis Morrisey; T.L. Morrisey and Charles Darrell were both executives in the insurance business. As well, Charles Darrell and his wife were Darrell's godparents; the two families were close and it is likely that the Darrell family, who lived in Sidcup, Kent, only two miles from Tudor Hall School, and who had nine children of their own, were like a second family to Darrell while she attended school in the UK. In September 1913 Darrell was accompanied by Charles Darrell to the UK and then to Tudor Hall School.

By the early 1920s Darrell Morrisey was beginning to make a name for herself as an artist in Montreal but she divided her time between Montreal and the United Kingdom, subsequently she wasn't well-known in either place. Darrell was only thirty-three years old when she died in London in 1930 from of a pre-existing and undiagnosed health issue. Her father, T.L. Morrisey, died in 1926, also in London, and we don't know where either Darrell or her father are buried.

The Morriseys were an accomplished family: Darrell was a member of one of the most important groups of artists in Canadian art history; Darrell's brother, Sydney, is a war hero who spent time in World War One in Siberia, he served with the Black Watch and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order in 1916. Sydney Morrisey was also an engineer, an inventor, a successful businessman, and a family man. Darrell's father, Thomas Louis Morrisey (1860-1926), rose to prominence in the insurance business, he also visited Ireland to research his Irish Catholic family history, but without much luck. There are photographs of T.L. Morrisey's Montreal office taken by William Notman in 1894 and they are included in the extensive collection of photographs from Notman's Montreal studio, archived on the McCord Stewart Museum website. T.L Morrisey published an essay, "Fire Insurance, an index to prosperity" in *Canada's Future, What She Offers After the War A Symposium of Official Opinions* (1916), a collection of essays that describe Canada's possible postwar future.

So far, I haven't mentioned Darrell's mother, Clara Paterson Morrisey (1864-1945); she seems to have been problematic, controlling, and overly attached to her son, Sydney, and I suspect that some of Darrell's frequent and extended visits to the UK were to avoid her mother, but I could be wrong. Clara Paterson Morrisey was born in Saint John, New Brunswick, and after

marrying T.L. Morrisey, in 1888, the family moved to Montreal; one of Clara's sisters married a Hemsley, of the prominent family of Montreal jewellers, and lived near Clara in Westmount.

How good an artist was Darrell? There is no answer to this question because so few of her paintings have been discovered, but she did receive good reviews for the paintings she exhibited with the Beaver Hall Group. One of my university professors used to say about some of the essays we wrote for her that they were "good but not great"; she wanted us to aim for something better than good. These five paintings we have of Darrell's are a random sampling of her work—presented here in the order in which they were discovered—are they good but not great? I am not an expert in evaluating art; like most people I go by what I like and I like Darrell's paintings. Nevertheless, if Darrell Morrisey has any importance it is because she was a member of the Beaver Hall Group of artists, and that is good enough to make her relatively important.

From around the mid-1800s to the 1970s the City of Montreal was prosperous, it was a cosmopolitan centre of business and culture; Montreal was made great by its French, Scots, English, and Irish citizens, all represented as founding groups on the flag of the City of Montreal. In addition to the Beaver Hall artists there were also other groups of artists and writers from Montreal, one of the most prominent, in the 1920s, was the McGill Group of poets; the McGill Group, comprised of several students at McGill University, brought modern poetry to Canada while the Beaver Hall artists and the Group of Seven brought modern art to Canada. The McGill Group were poets but they also accomplished much later in life; they included poets F.R. Scott (later a constitutional lawyer and law professor at McGill University), A.J.M. Smith (later an anthologist and professor at Michigan State University), John Glassco (later a translator and memoirist), A.M. Klein (later a lawyer), and Leon Edel (not a poet but later an important

biographer of Henry James). Another poet in this group is Leo Kennedy who is somewhat similar to Darrell Morrisey; neither fulfilled their early promise. Kennedy published only one book of poetry, *The Shrouding* (1933), and went into the advertising business. While Kennedy's writing career continued at a minor level until his death in 2000, Darrell Morrisey's career as an artist was cut short by her early death in 1930. Both Leo Kennedy and Darrell Morrisey never fulfilled their early promise and Darrell Morrisey remains, for the most part, still unknown as an artist, but at least she is no longer forgotten.

THE ART OF DARRELL MORRISEY

Darrell Morrisey (1897–1930) was a Canadian artist whose contributions to early 20th-century art, particularly within Montreal's Beaver Hall Group, have only recently received scholarly attention. Darrell Morrisey was a member of Montreal's Beaver Hall Group, a collective of Canadian artists active in the early 20th century. The group is notable for its inclusion of both male and female artists and its embrace of modernist styles. Despite her premature death and the subsequent disappearance of her works, Morrisey's paintings and her biography offer an interesting addition to the history of the Beaver Hall artists.

Morrisey received her artistic education at the Art Association of Montreal (AAM) between 1917 and 1920, studying under prominent artists such as Maurice Cullen and William Brymner. Her participation in the AAM's Spring Exhibitions and the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts' annual exhibitions during the 1920s reflects her active engagement with the Canadian art scene. In 1921, she exhibited a portrait at the inaugural exhibition of the Beaver Hall Group, a collective of artists dedicated to exploring modernist themes and techniques. She studied at the Art Association of Montreal (AAM) from 1917 to 1920, participating in several of its Spring Exhibitions during that period and later years. In June 1917, she took open-air drawing classes from Maurice Cullen in Phillipsburg, Quebec, and the following year from William Brymner in Calumet (now Pointe-Calumet), Quebec.

The Beaver Hall Group, established in 1920, was instrumental in advancing modern art in Canada. Unlike the contemporaneous Group of Seven, which focused predominantly on landscapes, the Beaver Hall artists embraced a diverse range of subjects, including portraiture and urban scenes, and were notable for their inclusion of women artists. Morrisey's involvement

with this group positioned her among peers who were at the forefront of artistic innovation in Montreal.

Morrisey's limited body of work is characterized by a focus on rural landscapes and one portrait. Her travels to Europe between 1921 and 1922, including visits to the United Kingdom, Italy, and France, likely enriched her artistic perspective.

The discovery of Morrisey's paintings has been a gradual process. In May 2024, a painting titled "Sunset Landscape", dated 1917, was identified in the United Kingdom and subsequently returned to Canada. This work, along with others that have surfaced, such as a depiction of L'église Notre-Dame-de-Grâce in Montreal, underscores her artistic range and the geographical breadth of her subjects.

Despite these discoveries, much of Morrisey's life and work remains shrouded in mystery. Her early death at the age of 33 and the subsequent disappearance of many of her paintings has contributed to her status as a "forgotten" artist within the Beaver Hall Group. Recent scholarly efforts, including essays and exhibitions, have begun to shed light on her contributions, emphasizing the need for further research to fully appreciate her role in Canadian art history.

In examining Darrell Morrisey's paintings, one not only gains insight into her personal artistic journey but also into the broader narrative of Canadian modernism. Her work reflects the dynamic interplay between tradition and innovation that defined the art scene in early 20th-century Montreal. As more of her paintings come to light, there is an opportunity to reassess her impact and ensure that her legacy is appropriately recognized within the canon of Canadian art.

Morrisey's artistic contributions are less documented compared to some of her contemporaries. However, a recently discovered painting titled "Sunset Landscape" (1917)

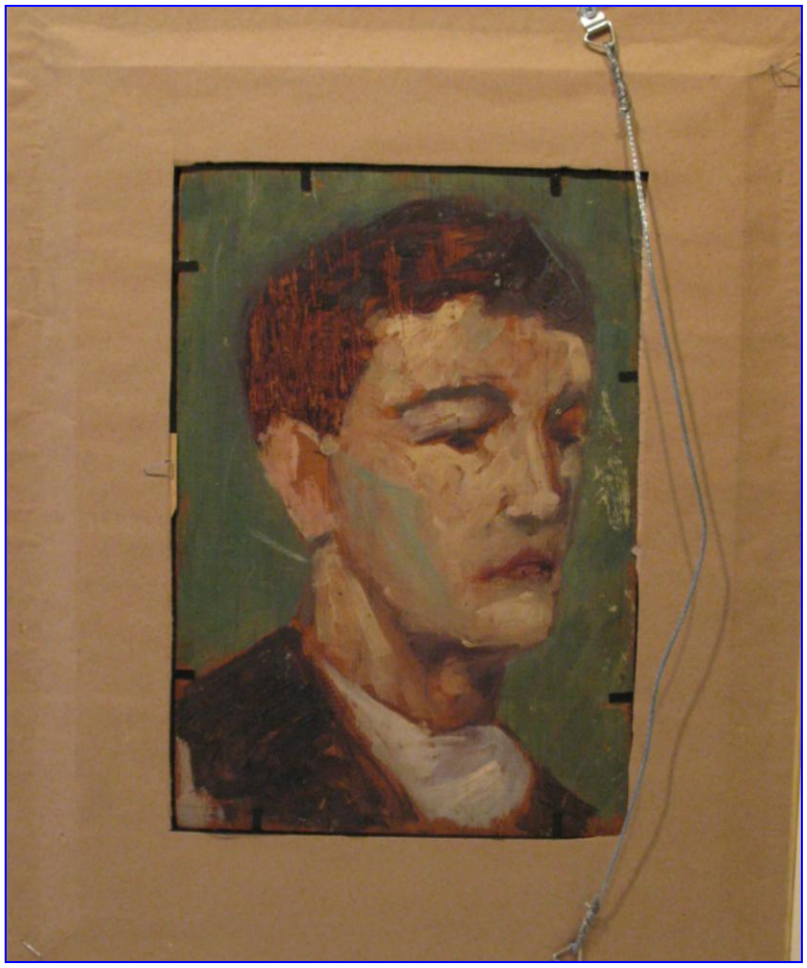
showcases her talent and provides insight into her style. While specific comparisons between Morrisey's work and that of other Beaver Hall artists are limited due to the scarcity of her known pieces, her association with the group suggests she shared their modernist approach and thematic interests. For a more comprehensive understanding of Morrisey's art in relation to her peers, further research and discovery of her works would be necessary.

Darrell Morrisey's artistic focus included portraits and rural landscapes. She exhibited at the first annual exhibition of the Beaver Hall Group in January 1921, presenting a portrait. Throughout the 1920s, her work was admired by critics in Montreal. She traveled in Europe from August 1921 to July 1922, visiting the United Kingdom, Italy, and she occasionally visited the United States.

Due to her early death and the subsequent disappearance of many of her paintings, Morrisey became one of the "forgotten" members of the Beaver Hall Group. However, recent discoveries have brought some of her works back into the public eye. In May 2014 the first of her paintings was discovered in her hometown, Westmount, Quebec, entitled "Landscape (possibly Pointe Calumet), Quebec". Ten years later, in May 2024, a painting titled "Sunset Landscape" was discovered in the United Kingdom. Additionally, in September 2024, two more paintings were found, including one depicting L'église Notre-Dame-de-Grâce in Montreal (located on the corner of Decarie and Avenue Notre-Dame-de-Grâce), believed to have been painted between 1927 and 1930. These recent discoveries have renewed interest in Morrisey's contributions to Canadian art, shedding light on her role within the Beaver Hall Group and the broader art community of her time.

DARRELL MORRISEY'S PAINTINGS

"Landscape (possibly Pointe Calumet), Quebec", by Darrell Morrisey; pre-1920; 20.3 x 29.2 cm. Discovered in the inventory at the West End Gallery, Westmount, Quebec, in May 2014.



This portrait is on the reverse side of "Landscape (possibly Pointe Calumet), Quebec"; pre-1920; 20.3 x 29.2 cm. I believe it is a portrait of Darrell Morrisey's brother, Thomas Sydney Morrisey.

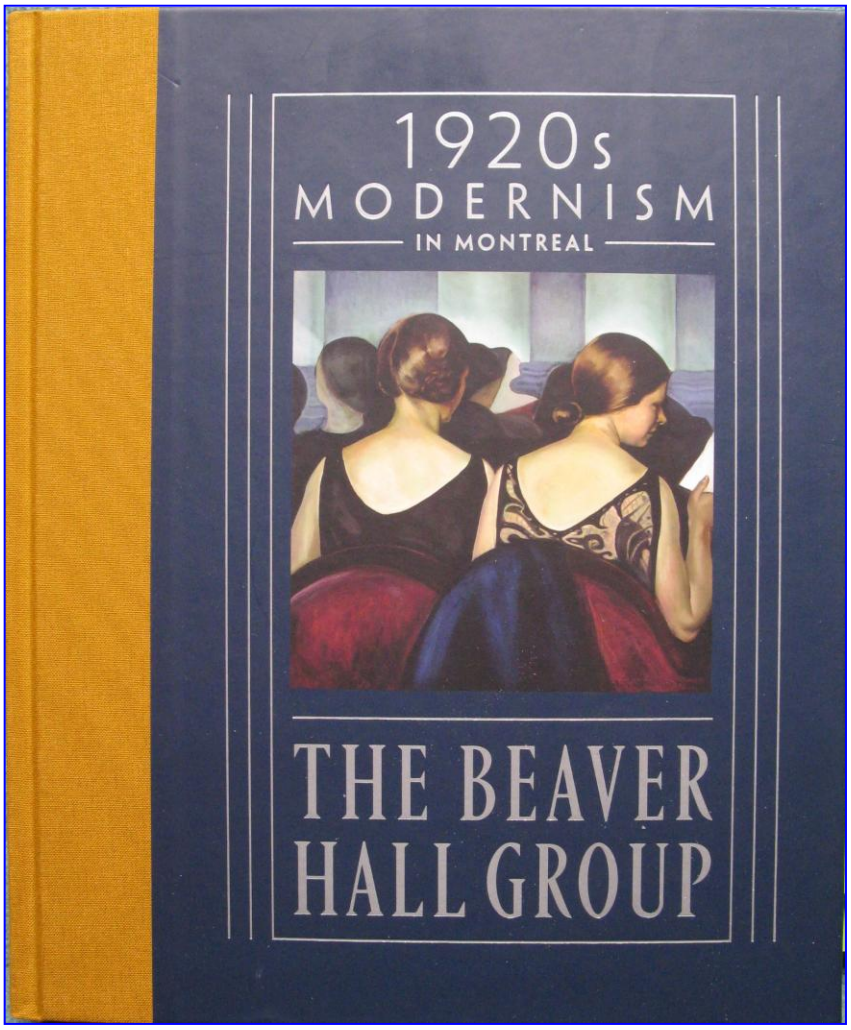
"Sunset Landscape", oil on board, signed with initials, inscribed and dated 1917;
13 x 19cm; discovered in the United Kingdom in 2024.

"Untitled", painted between 1927 and 1930; discovered in Ontario in April 2024 and sold in Lachute, Quebec; 34.29 x 28.58 cm framed.

"L'église Notre-Dame-de-Grâce" is painted on the reverse of the previous untitled painting; painted between 1927 and 1930; discovered in 2024; 34.29 x 28.58 cm framed.

EXHIBITION OF THE BEAVER HALL ARTISTS

An important exhibition, *1920s Modernism in Montreal, The Beaver Hall Group*, was held at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts/ Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, October 2015 to January 2016. Darrell Morrisey was mentioned in the exhibition and in the catalogue.



Catalogue, *1920s Modernism in Montreal, The Beaver Hall Group* (2015).

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

"Visiting Thomas Sydney Morrisey's grave on 12 March 2012" (13 March 2012); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2024/03/visiting-thomas-sydney-morriseys-grave.html

"Darrell Morrisey at the Linton Apartments" (22 December 2012); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2012/12/darrell-morrisey-at-linton-apartments.html

"Darrell Morrisey on Church Hill Avenue" (04 March 2013); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2013/03/darrel-morrisey-on-church-hill-avenue.html

"Home of Thomas Sydney Morrisey on Cedar Avenue, Westmount" (06March 2013); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2013/03/home-of-sydney-morrisey-on-cedar-avenue.html

"DARRELL MORRISEY, A Forgotten Beaver Hall Artist" (08 August 2015); accessed at HTTPS://ARCHIVE.ORG/DETAILS/DARRELLMORRISEYAFORGOTTENBEAVERHALLARTISTBYSTEPHENMORRISSEY/MODE/2UP

"Barbara Whitley, 1918-2018" (26 May 2018); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2018/05/barbara-whitley.html

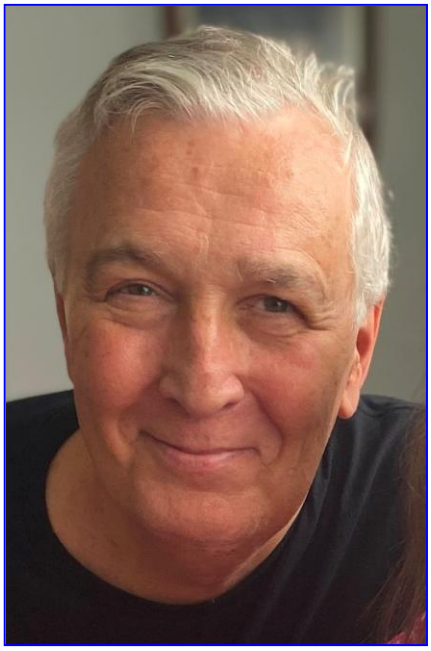
"Barbara Whitley, RIP" (04 June 2018); accessed at HTTPS://STEPHENMORRISSEYBLOG.BLOGSPOT.COM/2018/06/BARBARA-WHITLEY-RIP.HTML

"More on Darrell Morrisey" (07 March 2022); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2022/03/darrell-morrisey-at-mmfas-exhibit-1920s.html

"Two newly discovered paintings by Darrell Morrisey (05 October 2024); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2024/10/two-newly-discovered-paintings-by.html

"A newly discovered painting by Darrell Morrisey" (01 May 2024); accessed at https://stephenmorrisseyblog.blogspot.com/2024/05/a-newly-discovered-painting-by-darrell.html

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Stephen Morrissey was born in Montreal, the city where he still lives. He was educated at McGill University; while at McGill Morrissey won the Peterson Poetry Award. He has published ten books of poetry, several chapbooks, and two volumes on poetry and poetics; *Farewell, Darkness, Selected Poems* (Ekstasis Editions, 2023), collects poems that were published from 1971 to 2021. The Stephen Morrissey Fonds, 1963 - 2014, are housed at Rare Books and Special Collections of the McLennan Library of McGill University. Visit the poet at www.stephenmorrissey.ca

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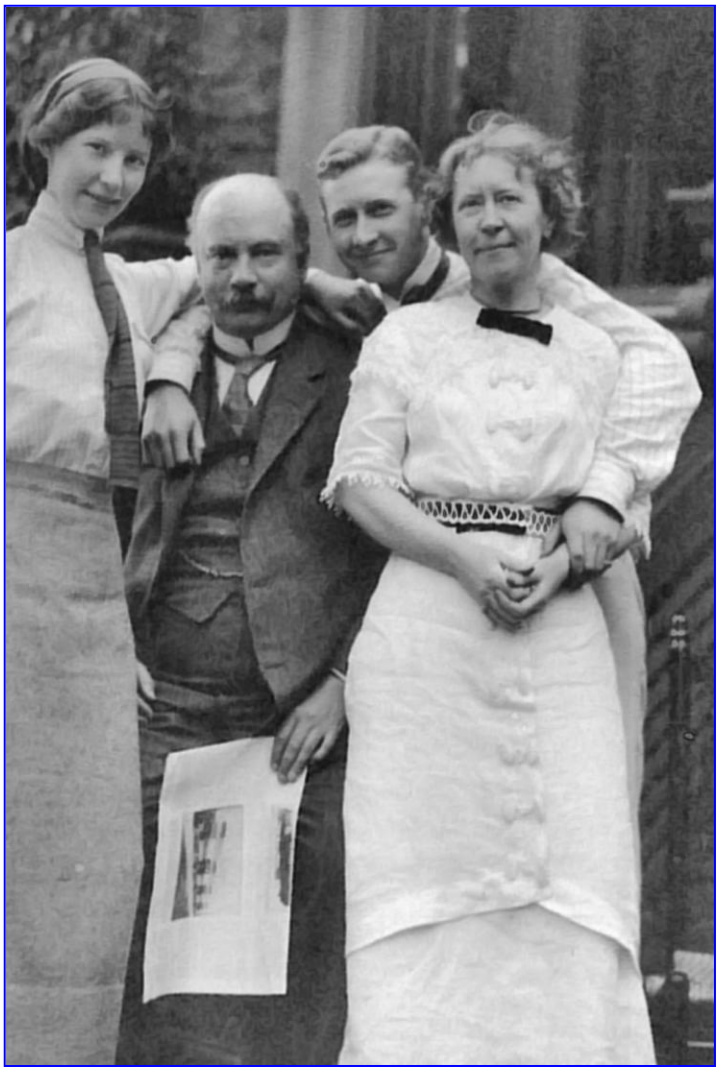

Morrisey family photograph taken on the front stairs of their home, "Hazelbrae", on Church Hill Avenue, Westmount. From left: Darrell Morrisey; her father, Thomas Louis Morrisey; her brother, Thomas Sydney Morrisey; and her mother, Clara Paterson Morrisey.